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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000549

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV, DS/IP/EA;; CA/OCS; PACOM FOR FPA

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SUBJECT: RANGOON TRIPLE BOMBINGS: MAY 9 SITREP

REF: RANGOON 542 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: DCM Ronald K. McMullen for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

1. (C) Summary: Two days following the May 7 triple bombing, Rangoon is quiet, but city residents are in a state of shock over the carefully coordinated explosions that targeted crowded areas frequented by affluent Burmese as well as by foreign residents. The GOB has not altered its casualty figures (11 dead and 162 wounded), but the actual toll could be at least as high as 25 dead and well over 200 wounded. All official Americans have been accounted for and there were no known Amcits among the casualties. Although U.S. mission personnel and other diplomats frequent the two grocery stores at the bombing sites, there is no evidence that American citizens were specifically targeted. The GOB's reaction has been telling: focus on security, leave trauma care to the overwhelmed and under-equipped public hospitals, and seize the opportunity for political gain by quickly blaming regime opponents. End Summary.

Quiet - but Shocked

2. (SBU) Rangoon is quiet two days after three deadly explosions rocked the city on May 7. The three bombing sites (a trade center and two shopping complexes) remain shuttered and heavily guarded, and authorities have closed or tightly restricted access to other major shopping centers and public venues. However, most commercial activity resumed on May 9 for a typical Monday morning in Rangoon and the city had a distinctive "business as usual" atmosphere.

3. (SBU) Despite the appearance of normalcy, however, city residents are in a state of shock after the triple bombings. Previous bombings in the capital and at upcountry locations, at least in recent years, have typically involved homemade-style explosives resulting in minimal loss of life and damage. The May 7 triple bombings, however, were large, carefully coordinated blasts that targeted crowded areas frequented by middle- and upper-class Burmese, as well as by diplomats and other foreign residents.

Casualties and Chaos

4. (C) The GOB has not altered its preliminary casualties figures (11 dead and 162 wounded). However, police and hospital sources indicate that the actual toll is likely higher (at least 16 confirmed dead and over 200 wounded) and, taking into consideration those victims who have subsequently succumbed to serious injuries, fatalities may exceed 25 dead.

5. (SBU) According to eye-witnesses, the explosions immediately led to chaos at the blast sites, where body parts and twisted wreckage made rescue a challenge. Eye-witnesses also observed that while the GOB responded quickly with security forces and riot police, the official emergency response was paltry and most victims were rushed to local hospitals with taxis and private vehicles.

6. (SBU) The focal point for emergency care has been Rangoon's General Hospital, which is the GOB's only non-military medical facility equipped to handle massive trauma. However, the hospital apparently reached maximum capacity at 90 patients and other victims were directed to a half dozen other government hospitals. Several sources have told Emboffs that security officials warned private clinics not to treat serious cases because the bombings were viewed as politically motivated, intimating that the GOB wanted full control of the emergency response.

No Know Amcit Targets or Victims

7. (SBU) According to Embassy sources, several foreigners were slightly wounded, including the son of the Cambodian ambassador and possibly a Malaysian citizen and several Koreans. All official Americans, including faculty at the U.S. mission-affiliated International School Yangon (ISY), have been accounted for and there were no known Amcits among the casualties. There were, however, several "close calls," as U.S. mission personnel and other diplomats frequent the

two City Mart grocery stores that were bombed. There is no evidence, however, that American citizens were specifically targeted in the bombings.

18. (SBU) The May 7 bombings instantly created speculation about possible motives (septel) and fed rumors about additional, thwarted bombings at other shopping centers. GOB sources deny that any explosive devices were discovered elsewhere in Rangoon. On May 8, two of Rangoon's largest hotels (Inya Lake and Traders) apparently received bomb threats, but security officials found nothing suspicious at either location and both hotels remained opened for business.

Comment: First Thing's First

19. (C) From a crisis management perspective, the GOB's reaction to the triple bombing left much to be desired. Emboffs and contacts who visited the blast sites within the first hour after the explosions were struck by the presence of hundreds of riot police and armed soldiers, but observed a total of two fire trucks and less than half a dozen ambulances activated for the entire crisis. End Comment.
Martinez